



First bid: 656M

Chinese tycoon seeks private Svalbard land for resort; tension grows between Norway, China

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Nope, there's no chance this turns into a train wreck.

Things are exciting enough speculating about a huge tract of private land near Longyearbyen being purchased by a Chinese tycoon who supposedly wants to turn the coal-rich area into a tourist resort.

But concerns about such a neighbor are likely to be heightened due to incidents including, among other things, outrage over Norway's leaders snubbing the Dalai Lama during a visit to Oslo this week at China's insistence, which may improve odds of the sale.

Huang Nubo, whose efforts to buy a vast area of land in Iceland were recently spurned, is offering 656 million kroner to purchase the 217-square-kilometer Austre Adventfjord property, according to AFP. The tract across from Longyearbyen in Adventdalen, one of

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE



LARS PETTER UGLAND / VISUALPERCEPTION.NO



SVALBARD TURN

The recreational class of participants, above, sets out from the starting line of the Svalbard Skimaraton near Mine 6 on Saturday. More than 800 people participated in full- and half-marathon courses, by far a record. At bottom left, Labor Party Leader and former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg gets an update from a polar bear guard during the race. At bottom right, Eldar Rønning, a World Cup champion who won the marathon decisively for the second straight year, celebrates with some of the 101 participants of a Children's Ski Day on Sunday at the race site.

POLITICAL SPORT

Former PM seeks stamina, champ seeks détente at ski marathon

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Having reached the top of their professions in dominating fashion, a politician and a ski racer essentially swapped roles for a day.

Former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg

completed his first ski marathon Saturday and six-time World Cup champion Eldar Rønning, after dominating the race for the second straight year, talked about using the Svalbard event for goodwill tours with Russian athletes

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Suddenly melting 10X faster

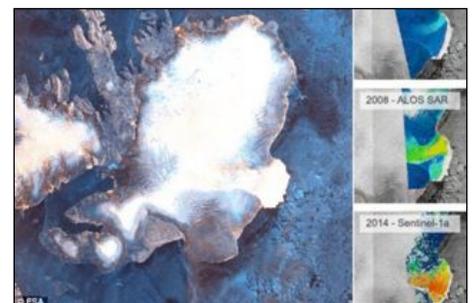
Austfonna ice cap vanishing after decades of stability, sparks concern about rising sea levels

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

If you suddenly found out your supposedly 10,000-kroner-a-month mortgage was actually draining 100,000 kroner a month from your account, it might be cause for concern about your home going underwater.

That scenario is playing out in a much

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COURTESY OF SHPARO.RU

The images at right show the melt rate of the Austfonna ice cap in 1995, 2008 and this year.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

South does some shaking of the north



Longyearbyen culture school students, above, perform an African rhythm dance April 30 at Kulturhuset. At right, visiting South African performers Terrence Mzisa and Kabelo Diale guide an audience-participation dance at the end of their collaborative show.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

Apparently the new short-lived social media thing, in the vein of planking and selfies, is "bathing boom" photos of yourself jumping into the ocean on something of a "dare you" basis. Apparently the washed-up concept originated in the Faroe Islands and "part of the exercise is to challenge a friend to do the same. If they do not, they owe you something," according to NRK. The network was among the numerous shamestream media types that naturally had to splash large and extremely pixelated pictures of polar plungers in Longyearbyen and Tromsø this week. The local dude (the first of the pictures to the right) is Svenn Are Johansen, who did it because "it was the wife of the boss who challenged me." **We're not sure which is weirder: 1) letting your built-for-the-Arctic body be seen nearly naked doing something idiotic on film or 2) telling the world you did it to impress the wife of your boss.** Still, he might emerge with his manhood less shriveled than Tromsø treader Thomas Amundsen, who appears to have dumped a pretty nice mountain bike into the ocean as well as himself ... Nothing too remarkably newsworthy seemed to happen during last week's May Day tour by Jens Stoltenberg (a.k.a. The Guy With Many Impressive Titles). At least not until we were doing a Google News search of his name and came across this surprising scoop: "The United States has changed its mind about Jens Stoltenberg, the new head of NATO. The U.S. Congress has passed a resolution blocking his appointment. **Apparently, during his youth, Stoltenberg threw stones at the US embassy in Oslo. As such, he constitutes a threat to American national security and Congress is rightly taking a stand.**" Um, the Norwegian media seems to have missed that in its rush to cover his notvery-competitive finish at the ski marathon, but



MONTASJE

Now hiring: swimsuit page editor for tabloid.

Must not be too lazy to spend more time finding trendy "bathing boom" photos of Arctic folks who look sexier naked than most do in real life.

not entirely implausible considering the U.S. just tried to appoint an ambassador to Norway that doesn't know we're a constitutional monarchy. It turns out the "scoop" is the opening paragraph of a *Foreign Policy in Focus* column accusing the U.S. of hypocrisy for doing something essentially as stupid with Iran's pick for its U.N. envoy (he was a translator who, horrors, did some of that during the hostage crisis in the late 1970s). We're not saying they're related, but we also noted if you do a Google search for "Jens Stoltenberg" the first auto-fill option is "trolls" ... Also from The Land of the Freedom Fries, the government's Accountability Office is sneering at the idea of developing marine infrastructure in the Arctic because, among other reasons, **"mainstream cruise lines aren't drawn to the Arctic because the 10-day journey...is too long, the scenery unvarying and interesting ports too scarce."** Given the massive and continuing long-term explosion in Arctic cruisers during the past 20 years (including more than half of Alaska's two million annual tourists), we're assuming the AO is staffed entirely by those one in four Americans who think the sun revolves around the Earth.



Øyvind Snibsøer, above center, pauses for a moment of silence at the Gruvebusen statue during the May Day celebration in Longyearbyen. At left, Labor Party leader Jens Stoltenberg pauses before a procession to the city center to place flowers at the foot of a memorial at Svalbard Church for Johannes Buø, 14, who was among the 69 people killed during the July 22, 2011, shooting at the Utøya youth camp. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM
SVALBARDPOSTEN
VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Ombudsman: Make patients' rights same as mainland's

Making patients' rights in mainland Norway applicable to Svalbard is being recommended by Social Services Ombudsman offices in the country's three northernmost regions. Odd Arvid Ryan, ombudsman for the Troms region, said the regulations adopted in 1927 are ripe for replacement. "There has been an accepted arrangement that patients have been able to contact the Social Services Ombudsman on the mainland," he said. "But this right is not enshrined in law" and that has resulted in unresolved disputes involving patients in liability damage cases. Implementing the proposal would likely take at least a couple of years because it would require changes to laws about Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard.

Seadrill agrees to pay secret settlement in tax shelter case

An oil drilling company that set up a tax shelter by establishing a one-person headquarters in Svalbard has agreed to pay an undisclosed settlement one week before the scheduled start of a trial, according to the Norwegian Tax Administration. Seadrill established the Svalbard office in 2007, transferring ownership of four rigs and a construction contract there to take advantage of the archipelago's 16 percent tax rate, compared to 28 percent on the mainland. The company paid about 770 million kroner from 2008 to 2010, a savings of about 600 million. The government altered tax rules to eliminate such havens in 2011 and billed Seadrill 1.5 billion kroner, prompting the company to file a lawsuit after shutting down its Svalbard office.

Hermansen sells cabin to pal happy to let him stay there

Former Store Norske Administrative Director Robert Hermansen, 75, has agreed to sell his cabin in Bjørndalen to longtime business and political acquaintance Benn Eidisse for 2.5 million kroner. Hermansen said he needs the money for debts and expenses following his conviction in a corruption scandal. Eidisse said he considers Hermansen an "an honorable man and a good friend" who can use the cabin as much as he wants when its not occupied.

Where mixing race, politics works

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in future years.

More than 800 people participated in full- and half-length courses through Todalen beginning at Mine 6, continuing a trend of record-shattering growth in recent years after organizers abandoned sign-up limitations implemented due to logistical concerns. Instead they've turned to aggressively seeking participants, including luring the likes of Rønning to attract interest.

Rønning winning time of two hours, three minutes and 17 seconds, while slower than his all-time race record of 1:59:35 last year, was still far ahead of Magnus Bleken at 2:11:58 and Sigve Høydahl at 2:19:42. But the victory mattered less than the experience which, unlike last year where poor snow cover forced last-second course alterations, included some of the best conditions in the race's 22-year history.

"Absolutely stunning surroundings and

brilliant weather," Rønning wrote in an Instagram message, where he posted a photo he took on the trail during the race (available at tinyurl.com/kqwauwc).

Afterward, he told *Svalbardposten* he plans to return next year with top Russian skiers to "create some fraternization" at the race and during a tour to Barentsburg.

Stoltenberg, whose time of 3:31:11 ranked 35th out of 60 men in the 51-60 age group, also used his visit to discuss cooperation during a series of May Day speeches. The Labor Party leader, who will become Secretary General of NATO on Oct. 1, said it's possible to seek common goals in the north despite tensions about issues such as the Ukraine crisis.

"My message is that the strength and firmness are not contradictory to cooperation and dialogue," he said.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. S winds to 42 km/h. High 3C (-2C wind chill), low -1C (-5C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. W winds to 52 km/h. High 4C (-3C wind chill), low -2C (-6C wind chill).	Snow. Variable winds to 18 km/h. High -1C (-4C wind chill), low -2C (-6C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. N winds to 29 km/h. High -2C (-7C wind chill), low -7C (-12C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -7C (-11C), -8C (-13C), light 24:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, -5C (-11C), -8C (-13C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -5C (-11C), -7C (-12C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, cloudy, -2C (-8C), -5C (-11C), light 24:00h			

Data provided by storm.no



JØRN HENRIKSEN / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

A cruise ship approaches a branch of the Austfonna ice cap in the southern part of Nordaustlandet.

Cause of Austfonna melt still uncertain

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more dramatic natural and global scenario as researchers have discovered Austfonna in East Svalbard, the world's third-largest ice cap, is suddenly melting at 10 times the rate of the past two decades. Beyond offering yet more evidence climate change may be occurring with full force, the scientists said they're concerned about the melt's potential impact on rising sea levels.

"We've observed Austfonna with various satellite radar datasets over the past 20 years, and it hasn't done very much," said Andy Shepherd, a professor at Leeds University, in an interview with the BBC. "But we've now looked at it again with the new Sentinel-1a spacecraft, and it's clear it has speeded up quite considerably in the last two or three years."

The measurements from the Sentinel-1a, a new radar spacecraft developed in the European Union, were presented to colleagues and the media last week in Brussels. The spacecraft can "see" through clouds, rain and pitch darkness, making it particularly useful for monitoring sea ice. Its images can also distinguish thinner, more navigable first-year ice and more hazardous, thicker multi-year ice.

Austfonna covers slightly more than 8,000 square kilometers on Nordaustlandet, making it the largest by area and second-largest by volume in Europe, and the seventh-largest in the world. It is about 200 meters in circumference

and a thickness of up to 560 meters, and its steep ice walls are a primary attraction for tourist ships.

But those tourists may end up feeling the effects of Austfonna's meltdown at their far-away homes if it becomes serious enough, Shepherd said.

"Although ice caps and glaciers contain less than 1 percent of the world's ice, they contribute around 50 percent of the sea-level rise due to ice melting," he said.

The causes of the sudden melt are part of a separate study the research team is now preparing for future publication in a science journal.

"It remains to be seen whether the abrupt speed-up reflects natural variability in the ice cap motion, or whether it is a symptom of regional climate change," Shepherd said.

Not that the findings are likely to make any more impact on climate skeptics than other recent studies suggesting climate change is already wreaking havoc due to freak droughts, storms and other incidents. Of 106 commenters responding to an article in *Daily Mail* of London, at least the first eight "top-rated" remarks heap ridicule on the researchers.

"Don't panic, its just the normal Earth cycle doing what it always has done over BILLIONS of years," wrote a resident of Huddersfield, England, in the top-rated comment.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

Dalai Lama snub to open Svalbard to China?

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two private land parcels in Svalbard, contains an estimated 20 million tons of coal.

China, or an entity from the country, is the most-often mentioned potential purchaser as it seeks to establish a strategic foothold in the Arctic. Concerns are being expressed by international observers about such a foothold.

Those concerns aren't likely to be lessened by the Norwegian government refusing to meet with the Dalai Lama his visit to Oslo this week to commemorate the Nobel Peace Prize he received there 25 years ago. The rejection came after China insisted Norway "must promise to never again congratulate a dissident Chinese winner" if it hoped to improve relationships,

according to NRK.

Huang denied playing a role in those demands, but told ARP "we'll definitely consider whether a country is friendly to China when we consider where to invest," he said.

"If (the Norwegian government) did meet the Dalai Lama, it would bring difficulties for my investment as the Chinese government would not approve the deal," he said.

While a majority of Norwegians in a poll denounced the snub as cowardly, the country's richest man, Stein Erik Hagen, added to the controversy by stating China deserves to get the Nobel Peace Prize

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's up

May 7

6 p.m.: Movie: "Walesa – Håpets Mann," Polish biography/drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 10

2 p.m.: Presentation about 200th anniversary of Norway's Constitution by author/historian Karsten Alnæs. Longyearbyen Library.

May 11

5 p.m.: Movie: "Bamse og Tyvenes By," Swedish children's film, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Gjenforeningen," Swedish drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 12

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barents Pub.

May 13

7 p.m.: Municipal Council meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7 p.m.: Evening Mass and fireplace social. Svalbard Church.

May 14

6 p.m.: Movie: "Pompeii," U.S. action/drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 15

7 p.m.: Book debut/presentation: "Uten Nåde" ("Without Mercy") by author/journalist Birger Amundsen, focusing on a polar bear attacks and hunting in Svalbard. Svalbard Museum.

May 17

200th anniversary celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day. Full schedule of events at tinyurl.com/mrhpqy and in the May 13 issue of Icepeople.

May 18

5 p.m.: Movie: "Ta meg med," Norwegian musical, all ages. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Godzilla" (3D), U.S. action/sci-fi, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

May 19

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barents Pub.

What's online

Icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Borge Ousland to cross Novaya Zemlya*
- *Arctic sovereignty: a short history*
- *Climate wrecking U.S.; citizens shrug*
- *Myken to offer 1st Arctic distilled whiskey*